



Living With Natural Areas

The Backyard Habitat Program comes to the Coves

Friends of the Coves Subwatershed Inc.
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Is this information for me?

Natural areas are valuable features of London's system of parks and open spaces. Many citizens, however, may not be aware of these local treasures and the need to protect them. What can you do - whether as a property owner or as someone out to enjoy the scenery and get some exercise - to minimize your impact on natural areas? This brochure answers that question.

For more information on the Friends of the Coves and our programs to promote living with nature, contact us at (519) 640-5397 or contact@thecoves.ca



What is a natural area?

Natural areas are wetlands, meadows, forests, valley lands and other relatively undisturbed lands that are home to many different plants and wildlife. Some contain rare plants, wildlife or landforms, or have features characteristic of the region before European settlement, or are especially large or diverse in habitat. Many natural areas are considered environmentally significant on a local, regional, provincial or even national scale.

Many cities and towns are working to preserve local natural areas. Settlement and development have destroyed much natural vegetation and caused some types of habitat to disappear completely. Often, natural areas contain the only remaining large sections of forest or wetland. They help us to learn about nature, provide clues to the current health of our environment, and add to our quality of life.

What are London's natural areas?

In the City of London, 16 natural areas are currently designated as "Environmentally Significant Areas" or ESAs. These areas represent a variety of habitats, including upland forests, wetlands and river corridors. In addition to the official ESAs, London has many other natural areas within the city limits.



What is the Coves Environmentally Significant Area (ESA)?

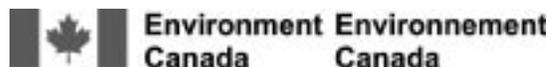
The Coves is one of London's ESAs situated in the central part of the City, south and west of the forks of the Thames River. It contains a series of three oxbow ponds and encompasses an area of approximately 3 hectares. This area is comprised of rare and diverse plants and animals that are directly affected by the surrounding neighbourhoods, throughout the whole Coves subwatershed. Since this ESA is primarily privately owned, we rely on homeowners to practice environmentally healthy habits to improve the health of the Coves ponds. If you live in the Coves subwatershed and would like to help make the Coves a healthier place, why not take part in the Backyard Habitat Program?

Backyard Habitat Program comes to the Coves!

The Friends of the Coves Subwatershed Inc. is pleased to announce the arrival of a Backyard Habitat Program in the Coves neighbourhoods. Environment Canada, the City of London, London Community Foundation, Upper Thames River Conservation Authority and ReForest London 150 have generously offered their support to help us improve the health of the Coves Subwatershed.

The Friends of the Coves will be offering free backyard habitat workshops and natural landscaping consultation. Where households are committed to naturalization, we will plant a native tree or shrub, free of charge. By making this commitment you will provide food and create habitat for wildlife, conserve water, improve the soil, and lessen the need for harmful pesticides and fertilizers. Information and resources on composting, rain barrels and invasive species control will also be available.

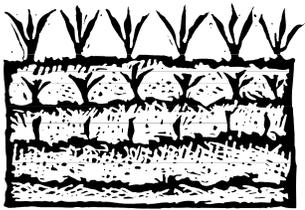
To start your backyard naturalization, please contact the Friends of the Coves Subwatershed Inc. by telephone at (519) 640-5397, or e-mail contact@thecoves.ca.



Around your home - having a positive impact

The properties that surround natural areas were once part of a wild landscape. Some yards still have remnants of particular habitat types, such as wet areas along the edge of a wetland. As development moves closer to natural areas, trees and other plants that were once in the middle of woodlands or wetlands, shielded by forests, are now exposed.

Because urban development sits on the doorstep of many natural areas, what is done in neighbouring yards is critical to their health. Here are some ideas to help home owners to ensure that their activities can help neighbouring natural areas and enhance their yards at the same time.



Can I dump my yard & garden waste in a natural area?

Dumped yard waste is bad news for any natural area. Dumped material smothers natural vegetation, may contain harmful chemicals, and often has plant seeds not found normally in the wild. If these materials are dumped in a natural area, the introduced seeds may grow where they fall. Native plants and the wildlife that depends on are constantly under threat from invading non-native plants.

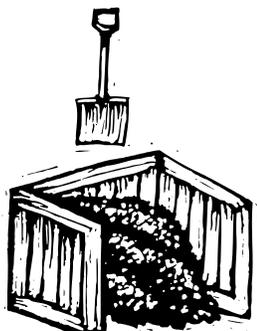
Charges for dumping waste can be laid under the Provincial Offences Act, with fines of up to \$5000. Call the London City Police at 661-5670 if you have concerns about waste being dumped illegally.

What should I do with yard & garden waste?

The best solution is to reduce and recycle as much as possible, by composting leaves, grass clippings, weeds and other materials on your own property. You reduce the amount of garbage going to landfills and create rich soil for your lawn and garden. If you can't use all your grass clippings, leaves and brush, ask your neighbours if they need more material for their home composters. Alternatively, put your yard waste out for curbside collection, or drop it off at London's Yard Waste Depots.

If you employ a professional gardener, check that proper disposal practices are followed. Reputable commercial gardeners are well aware of the City's yard waste regulations.

For yard waste collection dates and depot locations, phone 661-4585, go to www.london.ca, or check your Garbage Calendar. If you are having home composting problems, such as visits from unwanted wildlife, call the Rot Line (operated by the Thames Region Ecological Association, or TREA) at 672-5991 for free advice, or go to www.trea.ca.



What about encroachment into natural areas?

Thanks to people who recognize their property limits! If a lawn is mowed past property boundaries into a natural area, the rich habitat is replaced by a manicured lawn and the original diversity is reduced. The cumulative impact of dozens, even hundreds of landowners cutting into the edges of natural areas threatens their integrity.

Any activity extending onto publicly-owned property qualifies as encroachment. Simple examples of encroachment include expanding mowed land or extending fence lines. More permanent examples include planting gardens or trees, or installing other structures. All unauthorized encroachments past private lot lines into City parkland or open space are illegal under the Parks and Recreation Area By-Law PR-2, and may result in legal proceedings. Call the Realty Services Division at 661-5442 for more information.



Is it okay to use lawn and garden chemicals?

Remember that, just as water landing on your property doesn't always stay there, neither may all the chemicals that you put on your lawn, garden or driveway. If your property drains into a natural area, any chemical that you use can be carried by water into that area. By adopting an environmentally friendly approach to yard maintenance, you will enhance both your yard and the natural area beyond. Here are some tips to follow:

- Add compost to your lawn to fertilize it.
- Use a mulching lawnmower to return nutrients to your lawn.
- Cut your lawn at a high setting to reduce weed growth and retain moisture.
- Water grass early in the morning and allow it to dry out between waterings.
- Use alternative native ground covers in shaded areas.
- If you live next to a natural area, consider creating a buffer strip (up to 5 metres wide) on your property. Plant native shrubs and trees in the buffer to reduce the spillover effect.
- Investigate non-toxic alternatives to chemicals for control of pests, weeds and plant diseases.
- If you have to use pesticides, read the product labels carefully and use only as directed. Dispose of household and pool chemicals safely.



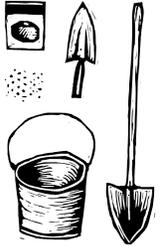
Did you know that, in general, approximately 10 times more pesticides are applied by city home owners than are used by farmers on an equal area of farm land?

Does it matter what I grow in my garden?

Alien alert! Be careful when growing plants that are not native to Southern Ontario. Plants don't recognize property boundaries and can spread easily from gardens to natural areas. Many alien species do not have natural predators here and are extremely invasive. For example, the beautiful European import called Purple Loosestrife is flourishing across North America, invading wetlands and out-competing native plants. As a result, plant diversity is reduced and fewer places remain where native wildlife can survive.

Other common species that out-compete native plants are Norway Maple, Periwinkle, and Goutweed (Goat's Foot). Check with your local nursery to find out which plants are native to the London region before purchasing. Native plants are better adapted to the climate, soil conditions, insects and diseases of this area.

The City of London Urban Forester (661-2500 ext. 4977) or the Planning Department (661-2500 ext. 4980) can provide you with the *Guide to Plant Selection for Environmentally Significant Areas*, listing plants suitable for use near natural areas and which plants to avoid in Middlesex County.



Can I attract wildlife to my yard?



Habitat loss is the number one threat to wildlife today. With time and careful planning, you can create habitat in your back yard and provide a safe haven for many species to visit. Wildlife will be attracted by food, water and shelter, but these elements must be arranged so that birds and animals are not exposed to danger. Cats can have a major impact on bird and animal populations. Keeping your cat indoors from May to July will reduce

its impact on nesting birds and small animals. Squirrels drawn to birdfeeders will also eat eggs and nestlings.

A natural area can be a great source of scenic beauty and pleasure. These areas may also be home to insects, such as mosquitoes, that are an important link in the food chain. Suitable clothing and insect repellants will help you avoid becoming part of the chain.



Stepping out in the ESAs - "Take only memories, leave only footprints"

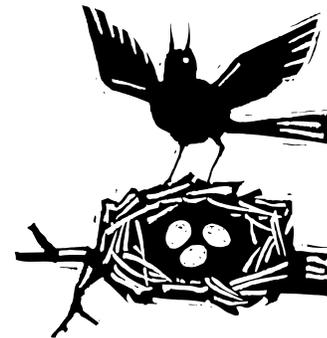


Unlike the Coves ESA, most natural areas within the city are accessible to the public. The ESAs in London contain rare and endangered plants and animals, unique landforms, and habitats that are prized for their high quality and diversity. However, the very features that make them precious are also those that could be easily damaged by unwise actions. Most damage occurs when people leave the marked trails and trample vegetation. You can enjoy these natural areas without harming them, and leave them in a healthy state for their "residents" and future visitors.

Can I take anything from a natural area?

Natural areas are often the only wild place remaining for rare native wildflowers to grow. These plants may have complicated life cycles or need seeds from existing flowers to regenerate the next year. Removing even a few plants can jeopardize the remaining population. Some garden centres stock a wide variety of native plants, trees and shrubs. These have a much better chance of surviving in your yard as they have been raised under similar soil and light conditions.

It is tempting to pick plants for food or herbal remedies, but this practice, just like transplanting, is not appropriate or sustainable. Even a few people picking plants can put the local population of that species in danger. Besides, those plants have a more important role in the natural environment than as food or medicine for humans!



A natural area is no place to find firewood or lawn decorations. Taking dead wood from a natural area will hurt that area's health in the long-term. As wood decays, it contributes nutrients to the soil and provides food and shelter for thousands of tiny organisms. In addition, new growth often depends on old stumps and logs. Cutting trees and brush destroys habitat, tramples vegetation and disturbs wildlife.

Enjoy wildlife when you discover it, but leave it in its natural setting. Don't make survival harder by taking animals out of their homes, leaving fewer behind to carry on. It is impossible to give a wild animal the proper care and nutrition to keep it healthy and happy. Also, it is illegal to keep wild animals, even injured ones, in captivity without a permit.

You can help out the local naturalists and Friends of the Coves Subwatershed who regularly remove litter from the natural areas. Pick up any litter that you find and dispose of it properly, and, of course, don't leave any more behind!



Beware!

If you encounter a plant with three shiny green leaflets, leave it alone! You may have found poison ivy, which is abundant in many natural areas. Many people get nasty rashes from the sap of this plant, whether from direct contact with the leaves, roots and stems or from

touching pets or equipment that have the sap on them. Remember, though, that poison ivy is part of the food chain, growing berries that are edible for birds and animals. Learn to recognize and avoid it, rather than trying to get rid of it. Poison ivy is usually found in partial shade as a knee-high ground cover, but can also grow as a vine up tree trunks. "Leaflets three, let it be!"



Deer, Deer!

If you are bothered by deer foraging in your backyard, here are some suggestions to protect your garden.

Make your garden unpalatable - Garden centres and the Internet are good sources of information on "deer proof plants." Beebalm, bleeding heart, butterfly bush, cone flower, foxglove and rhododendron are among the plants that deer don't like eating.

Make the fringes unpalatable - Surround your property with unpalatable and repellent native plants, and the deer may decide to forage elsewhere. Cedar and yew are delicacies for deer and should be avoided. White spruce, tamarack and juniper are good substitutes as deer will avoid them.

Block the view - Deer want an unobstructed view to see approaching predators and do not like to venture past anything that they cannot see through or over. A trellis covered in vines may discourage them.

Block the landing sites - Deer will not jump into your yard if they cannot see where they will land. Wooden fences or lattices that obstruct their view are a good deterrent.

Tidy up - Pick fruit such as apples and pears as they ripen, and remove or till under plants in the vegetable garden after harvest.

Fence them out - Specific trees or beds can be protected with mesh or screen. The barriers should be at least two metres high and at least half a metre from the foliage.

Where can I find out more?

Information on the Backyard Habitat Program:

- Friends of the Coves Subwatershed Inc. at (519) 640-5397 or e-mail contact@thecoves.ca

Information on being a good natural neighbour:

- For composting tips call the "Rot Line" at 672-5991 or visit www.trea.ca. This free service is offered to the public by the Thames Region Ecological Association (TREA).
- *Backyard Habitats* (pdf brochure) is available on the Ontario Nature web site at www.ontarionature.org
- Johnson, Lorraine, 1995. *The Ontario Naturalized Garden*. Whitecap Books, Toronto, Ontario.
- Ministry of Natural Resources, 1990. *Landscaping for Wildlife*. Queen's Printer for Ontario, Ontario.
- Rubin, Carole, 1989. *How to Get your Lawn & Garden off Drugs*. Friends of the Earth, Ottawa, Ontario.



UPPER THAMES RIVER
CONSERVATION AUTHORITY

This brochure was published in 2005 by the Friends of the Coves Subwatershed Inc. and the Upper Thames River Conservation Authority. The brochure is based on *Living with Natural Areas - A Guide for Citizens of London*, originally produced by the UTRCA, the City of London's Ecological and Environmental Planning Advisory Committee, and Celebrate the Thames.

The Coves Subwatershed & ESA

